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14th ANNUAL SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL WRAPS AFTER 5 SENSATIONAL DAYS OF SUPERB PROGRAMMING AND WINE COUNTRY HOSPITALITY

SONOMA, CA (April 12, 2011) – The Sonoma International Film Festival wrapped its 14th season yesterday with 90 films shown in 9 screening venues – all within walking distance of the historic Sonoma Plaza – during the 5 day event (April 6-10).

"The hospitality in this town is amazing!" exclaimed Mike Flanagan whose film *ABSENTIA* won this year's Best Narrative Feature. "It's been a dream weekend." Many other filmmakers agree that the spirit of the Sonoma International Film Festival is second to none. Philipp Wolter, director of *THE BRIDGE* – which won Audience Favorite Short – captured it best during his acceptance speech: "This festival has been an amazing experience. It's been fantastic...3 or 4 days, I don't even know how long I've been here and I don't want to leave!"

The enthusiasm of the filmmakers was equaled by the audience who filled multiple venues to capacity. In order to meet audience demand the Festival added additional screenings and special recognition to *DARWIN* directed by Nick Brandestini. Program Director Cevin Cathell recognized the film during the Awards Ceremony after a third showing of *DARWIN* was added to Sunday's program so that filmgoers turned away from earlier screenings had the opportunity to watch this documentary about an isolated community in Death Valley.

"What started out as a film festival that hosted great parties has grown into a festival where the films equal the fun," said Executive Director Kevin McNeely, "People are starting to understand why filmmakers and audiences love this Festival so much." With increased attendance and box office sales, additional screening venues, a high caliber of films and a record number of film submissions from esteemed and emerging filmmakers, the 14th Annual Sonoma International Film Festival proved that this small-town festival has certainly claimed its place among premiere festivals worldwide. Program Director Cevin Cathell commented, "We are incredibly proud of the quality of the films we screened this year. This year has really raised the bar."

Known as a Festival of Film, Food and Wine, the Festival is a gourmet affair to delight all the senses – from the flickering of the silver screen to tasty plates and sparkling wines. The festivities centered around the "Backlot" hospitality tent located in the Sonoma Plaza. Furnished by Wine Country Party & Events, this elaborate tent was decorated with chic lounge furniture, dazzling chandeliers and original artwork and warmed by live music throughout the weekend. A new twist on festival food inspired by the street food trend was introduced this year; the Festival invited food truck vendors to participate in the 5-day event, treating festival-goers to an array of choices, including piping hot donuts, wood-fired

pretzels, Chicago-style hot dogs, smokey BBQ and an outdoor beer garden. Rounding out the charm of the event was the vintage Sebastiani Trolley Car shuttling guests between venues.

Sponsors and Partners

Dolby Laboratories was the presenting sponsor again this year, with 32 sponsors overall, including Comcast, New Belgium Brewing, Vode Lighting, Infineon Raceway, Wine Country Party & Events, Sebastiani Winery, Canon and the City of Sonoma.

"This year we had an incredibly diverse and savvy film crowd. I was thrilled with the enthusiasm and spirit of the audience and our patrons," said Sponsorship Director Leslie Carlson. An exceptionally good pairing of a quality audience and the message of the sponsors added to the overall environment of the Festival this year. "Many of our sponsors said they will be returning next year and even stepping it up," said Carlson.

In keeping with the wine country code of good living at its best, many Festival sponsors included local food and wine labels who kept filmgoers fed and happy at each of the screening venues. Among the food and beverage sponsors were Luna Bars, popchips, Mia's Kitchen, The Other Guys Wines, Gloria Ferrer Caves & Vineyards, Cuties California Mandarins, Wonderful Pistachios and Purity Organics.

Media Partners included Word Mice, Sonoma News, Sonoma Valley Sun, Diablo Magazine, Napa Sonoma Magazine, MF Magazine and Moving Pictures Magazine.

Hotel rooms and transportation were provided by MacArthur Place, Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn, Best Western Sonoma Valley Inn, The Renaissance Lodge at Sonoma, Pure Luxury Transportation and Sonoma Chevrolet. As in years past, the local chapter of the Native Sons of The Golden West provided drivers and safe transportation for special guests throughout the weekend.

Star-Studded Events

The Festival presented Academy Award® winning actress Susan Sarandon, with its Lifetime Achievement Award on Saturday, April 9. The award honors a creative talent who, through the course of his or her career, has created a body of work which symbolizes the highest level of achievement in the motion picture art form.

Festival Director Kevin McNeely said, "Susan Sarandon's impressive ongoing contributions to the motion picture industry, social activism, and the exemplary manner that she conducts her private life makes her a worthy recipient of our Festival's highest honor."

An audience of 500 attended the tribute and award ceremony held at the Sonoma Veterans Memorial Hall. The tribute featured a montage of clips from Sarandon's films, created by filmmaker Eric Paul Fournier, interspersed with an on-stage discussion with award-winning documentarian Eames Yates about Sarandon's career, her co-stars and her latest passion: ping pong.

Images from the Susan Sarandon Tribute are available on Getty Images and Wire Image sites.

MISS REPRESENTATION, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, was screened before a full house at the Sebastiani Theater on Friday April 8. After the film, Newsom gave a candid and thoughtful Q&A session

with Festival Director Kevin McNeely. During a reception for the film at the Lisa Kristine Gallery, Newsom's husband, Lt. Governor and former Mayor of San Francisco Gavin Newsom, made an appearance in support of his wife's accomplishments. The film was announced as Audience Favorite Documentary at the Awards Ceremony on Sunday night.

Hal Holbrook and Robert Patrick delighted crowds on Friday – both outdoors in the Sonoma Plaza during a live radio interview and at the screening of their film premiere GOOD DAY FOR IT, directed by Nick Stagliano.

Tia Carrere mingled with guests on Opening Night at El Dorado Kitchen before the screening of her film, YOU MAY NOT KISS THE BRIDE, directed by Rob Hedden.

Parties and Events

An early preview of the Festival was celebrated with a reception at the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art on Sunday, April 3. Hosted by Kevin and Rosemary McNeely, this preview event for patrons, donors and media highlighted the Festival program. Catered by Sheana Davis of Epicurean Connection, guests enjoyed hand-made cheeses, roasted duck canapés along with dried fruits and roasted nuts. Wine poured by Muscardini Cellars.

The Festival kicked off with a cocktail hour at El Dorado Kitchen on Wednesday April 6. In attendance were Tia Carrere and Rann Watumull of Hawaii Film Partners, whose film YOU MAY NOT KISS THE BRIDE premiered at the Festival as one of two Kick Off film selections.

On Thursday April 7, the Festival Backlot tent went up in the Sonoma Plaza and guests were invited to an Opening Night soirée featuring live music, Gloria Ferrer sparkling wines, sushi and noodles by Ed Metcalfe, and delightful popchip appetizers in the dazzling hospitality tent. Opening Night wrapped up with a lively party at Little Switzerland with live music by The Sun Kings, a Beatles tribute band.

Friday April 8 was filled with industry events, including Industry Mixers at Hopmonk Tavern and The Valley Wine Shack. Later that night, after a full day of films, a Centerpiece Celebration was held at Hopmonk Tavern where filmmakers and guests feasted on fondue, hearty sandwiches and an array of bite-sized sweets. Guests enjoyed the outdoor firepit and the Gordon Biersch select brews.

The Festival Gala was held at the Sebastiani Winery on Saturday April 9, following the Tribute for Susan Sarandon. Prior to the Tribute, a meet & greet with Sarandon was hosted by Lokal restaurant and beer house. The Festival Gala featured an outdoor buffet highlighting local chefs and restaurants. Guests enjoyed a selection of delicious options and a blazing fire kept everyone warm. Sebastiani wines were poured indoors where guests played ping pong and danced to music by the band Crossfire in the Barrel Room. Sarandon had a private reception catered by Dreamers & Heroes before joining Gala guests. In honor of Sarandon's cult classic THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW, actors dressed in themed costumes delighted the audience.

The weekend wrapped with an Awards Ceremony on Sunday April 10, in the Backlot tent. For more information about the 2011 Festival Award Winners, please see our website Awards page:

<http://www.sonomafilmfest.org/2011-award-winners-announced/>.

Student Program

On Thursday morning, April 7, a showcase of student films screened at the Sebastiani Theater. A much-anticipated part of the Festival, these short films are created by students of Peter Hansen's Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts program, which was founded by the Sonoma International Film Society over a decade ago. This audience favorite is a highlight for local students and the budding filmmakers who work all year on their films. "They feel like rock stars," Hansen says, then adds – "No....they are rock stars for a day!"

Panels and Juries

Known for unique programming, this year's panels were a highlight of the Festival schedule. The presentations included "So You Want To Be A Star?" a workshop led by Sonoma local Donn Finn, partner in Mali Finn Casting, the people who cast AVATAR, TITANIC, THE MATRIX, L.A. CONFIDENTIAL and THE GREEN MILE, to name a few. Topics ranged from audition skills for film and television to effective reading and interview techniques.

The "Pitch Panel" moderated by screenwriter Jason White was a repeat performance of one of the Festival's most popular panels to date. Audience members with an idea for a film delivered two-minute pitches before getting feedback from a panel of film industry professionals.

A panel on UFOs and extra-terrestrials – moderated by James Fox, Jim Ledwith and Stephen Bassett – explored the esoteric question, "Are We Alone?" A scientific and extensively-researched look at life beyond earth, the panelists discussed topics such as the alleged existence of crop circles and the government's 'truth embargo' about extra-terrestrial life, exploring the paradigm shift regarding the subject matter.

The panel of jurors this year included Arianne Ayers of Magnolia Pictures; screenwriters Alan Berger and Kathi Gori; Donn Finn, Mali Finn Casting; producer's rep David Garber, owner of Lantern Lane Entertainment; award-winning producer and former HBO VIP Ilene Kahn Power; award-winning documentarians Catherine Ryan, Gary Weimberg & Eames Yates; and screenwriter & producer Jason White. "I am pleasantly surprised by the selections of our esteemed jury. They have been incredibly supportive of the Festival over the years, bringing industry presence and experience, elevating our Festival to the next level," said Program Director Cevin Cathell.

SIFF and Social Media

SIFF was named by MediaShift.com as one of the Top 20 Film Festivals using Twitter and social media to boost attendance and engagement. This year, the Festival announced various programs to connect Festival-goers with each other and with local businesses including "check-ins" with Foursquare and Facebook Places as well as a live Twitter feed of the festival tweets hashtagged "#siff11" – the official Twitter festival hashtag. Many fans "Liked" SIFF on Facebook <http://facebook.com/sonomafilmfestival> and followed the Festival on Twitter <http://twitter.com/sonomafilmfest> to get Festival information as it was announced, including the latest "check-in" hotspots at Festival venues as well as local businesses. The ABSENTIA film crew and SIFF's social media team, WordMice, competitively tweeted and

Facebooked the Award announcement on Sunday night from the Backlot Tent. It was a race to the finish! SIFF won. (Sorry, ABSENTIA.)

Filmmaker interviews and other videos are available on the SIFF website:

<http://www.sonomafilmfest.org/2011-video-clips-by-sonomatv/>. Trailers and promotional videos are available on our YouTube channel <http://youtube.com/sonomafilmfestival>. For videos of Susan Sarandon's Tribute and a montage of Film Festival footage by Cult Sonoma, please see our website: <http://www.sonomafilmfest.org/>. Our trusty yet debauched mascot, Tipsy, will be your guide.

About the Sonoma International Film Festival

The Sonoma International Film Festival is one of the top destination film festivals in the world and, located in the heart of Wine Country, is uniquely positioned to be a lively celebration of film, food and wine. An annual gathering for film industry insiders, cinema enthusiasts, filmmakers and critics, SIFF is considered among the most scenic and epicurean places to experience the art of film. Founded in 1997, The Sonoma International Film Festival is a five-day international event that takes pride in showcasing emerging talent and featuring unreleased films.

SIFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Festival supports the Sonoma Valley High School Media Arts Program established over a decade ago by the Sonoma Film Society. For information about the 2012 Festival, please contact SIFF:

Phone (707) 933-2600

www.sonomafilmfest.org

<http://www.facebook.com/sonomafilmfestival>

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